

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1, 3, 7, 8, 15, 16, 17, and 18 are amended herein. Claims 5, 6, and 10 are canceled and claims 21-23 are added. All pending claims are presented below.

1. (Currently Amended) A method for countering spam that disguises characters within an electronic message, said method comprising the steps of:

locating portions of the electronic message where [[the]] a difference between

foreground color and background color is negligible, comprising:

determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the

background color is a gray-scale color; and

responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the background

color being a gray-scale color, deeming the difference between the

colors to be negligible based on a comparison of saturation and

brightness values of the colors regardless of hue values of the colors;

deleting from the electronic message foreground characters from said portions, to

form a redacted electronic message; and

forwarding the redacted electronic message to a spam filter.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising setting a negligibility threshold such that, when the difference between foreground color and background color is negligible for a certain portion of the electronic message, said portion is invisible or nearly invisible to a typical human viewer of the electronic message.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said locating step comprises, responsive to neither the foreground color nor the background color being a gray-scale color, comparing hue, saturation, and brightness of the foreground and

background colors.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3 wherein information giving red, green, and blue components of foreground and background colors is given in the electronic message, and said information is converted into hue, saturation, and brightness values.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Canceled)

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[6]] 1 wherein the difference between the foreground color and the background color is deemed to be negligible when the difference in saturation between foreground and background is less than 5%, and the difference in brightness between foreground and background is less than 4%.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[6]] 1 wherein the difference between the foreground color and the background color is deemed to be negligible when the difference in saturation between foreground and background is less than 3%, and the difference in brightness between foreground and background is less than 2%.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein neither the foreground color nor the background color is a gray-scale color, and the locating step comprises comparing hue, saturation, and brightness of the foreground and background colors.

10. (Canceled)

11. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the difference between the foreground color and the background color is deemed to be negligible when the difference in hue between foreground and background is less than 4 degrees, and the combined difference in saturation and brightness values of the foreground and background is less than 12%.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic message comprises e-mail, and the locating step comprises using a HTML parser.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the locating step comprises using a color comparison module.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the spam filter is responsive to characters within the electronic message.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic message is a message from the group of messages consisting of: comprising e-mail, instant messages, chat room messages, newsgroup messages, wireless messages, Morse code messages, SMS messages, MMS messages, EMS messages, text pager messages, and graphics pager messages.

16. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable storage medium containing executable computer program instructions for countering spam that disguises characters within an electronic message, said computer program instructions performing the steps of:

locating portions of the electronic message where [[the]] a difference between foreground color and background color is negligible, comprising:
determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color; and
responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the background color being a gray-scale color, deeming the difference between the colors to be negligible based on a comparison of saturation and brightness values of the colors regardless of hue values of the colors;

deleting from the electronic message foreground characters from said portions, to
form a redacted electronic message; and
forwarding the redacted electronic message to a spam filter.

17. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein
the locating step comprises, responsive to neither the foreground color nor the
background color being a gray-scale color, comparing hue, saturation, and brightness of
the foreground and background colors.

18. (Currently Amended) Apparatus for countering spam in an electronic
message, said apparatus comprising:

means for locating portions of the electronic message where [[the]] a difference
between foreground color and background color is negligible, comprising:
means for determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the
background color is a gray-scale color; and
means for, responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the
background color being a gray-scale color, deeming the difference
between the colors to be negligible based on a comparison of
saturation and brightness values of the colors regardless of hue values
of the colors;

coupled to the locating means, means for deleting from the electronic message
foreground characters from said portions; and
coupled to the deleting means, a spam filter.

19. (Original) The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the locating means comprises a
color comparison module.

20. (Original) The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the deleting means comprises a parser.

21. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color comprises:

determining whether the saturation value of at least one of the foreground color and the background color is zero.

22. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 16, wherein determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color comprises:

determining whether the saturation value of at least one of the foreground color and the background color is zero.

23. (New) The method of claim 2, further comprising:

responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the background color being a gray-scale color, comparing the negligibility threshold to a color difference value, the color difference value based on the differences in saturation values and brightness values of the foreground and background colors.